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John H.

From: John Holmes
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Very helpful

The page 2 history
is spot on.

PRIME MINISTER

TALKS WITH BRUTON: NORTHERN IRELAND

... I attach a self-explanatory letter to the NIO setting out developments with the Americans and the Irish over the weekend.

The most important point for tomorrow is how we react to the new Irish proposed joint language. I do not think you can accept it as it stands, since it still suffers from the same basic fault of wanting in effect to pin us to a timescale. We may want to argue that the search for joint language is in vain, since although we are close the gap between us cannot be bridged/fudged without putting one or other of us in considerable difficulty. I continue to prefer the greater flexibility afforded by speaking to the press separately, rather than joint language, which will be crawled over and invested with huge significance.

If we did want to try for a joint formulation, we could counter with something along these lines:

"There has to be an early, credible and convincing ceasefire. The republican movement have to tell us that they intend to end violence for good. Action on the ground clearly has to be consistent with a genuine ceasefire. In those circumstances, and given that we wish to see Sinn Fein in an inclusive talks process, we would hope that the IRA and Sinn

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Fein could meet the necessary conditions rapidly ~~and be ready to join the~~
~~talks early next year.~~ The onus is on them to establish clearly that they
have met the necessary conditions."

Something on these lines would be consistent with our 28 November statement
and your interview formulation. It could be just about defensible with the UUP
and backbenchers. But it would also be seen as a further step towards the
Irish/US position. Can you afford this in present circumstances? *Not not* ~~the~~.

Wherever we finish up on language, the Taoiseach will clearly press you to say
privately what timescale you really have in mind and what conditions you really
want the IRA/Sinn Fein to meet. Part of the response is that, even if you
wanted to do otherwise, you have no political choice but to put the onus
squarely on the IRA to deliver. But you will need other arguments too. In
addition to those we have deployed already, you could draw on the following:

- ✓ - I want the pressure to be on the IRA to convince me, not on me to let
Sinn Fein in whatever the IRA are doing.
- ✓ - Setting a date will create great pressure on me from you and others to
ignore inconvenient developments and meet the date. I will inevitably be
accused of betrayal if I withhold an invitation on the date. How will that
help?
- ✓ - A convincing-sounding ceasefire will help to create a new dynamic and
enable me to work on the Unionists to accept relatively early entry.
- Setting a date now, before a ceasefire, will turn the Unionists definitively
against the possibility of early entry from the beginning. This could lead

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to a rapid and total collapse of the talks. That will not help anyone, or lead to a ceasefire.

- Of course Sinn Fein want a date because they don't trust us. But they should have thought of that before they broke the ceasefire and destroyed their own credibility. They have to prove things to us, not the other way round.

- If Sinn Fein want a ceasefire enough (and they need one for electoral reasons) and are genuine enough about it lasting, they will not be deterred by lack of a specific date.

- (Reliance on intelligence enables you to prevaricate endlessly, citing evidence which cannot be challenged.) Accept this may cause a difficulty. But the alternative is to ask me to accept as genuine a ceasefire which I know very well is not genuine. How can I defend that after what happened last time?

- I want to create a situation where, even if the talks do not progress much before the election, they can be reconvened afterwards with all the parties there. That is achievable but needs great care. A false move now could wreck the prospects.

If you think we should go back to the Irish tonight, I am happy to have a word this evening. Otherwise, perhaps we could discuss briefly tomorrow morning.

JOHN HOLMES

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